

# RPG Reload File 049 – 'Doom 2 RPG'

[July 30, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we sometimes vanquish demons with toilet water. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it holds up in the here and now. It's a chance for a deeper dive than our reviews typically allow, giving us the chance to revisit old favorites and reflect on their position in the overall iOS RPG scene. Your only guide on this journey is Shaun, an observer from your own time, who appears in the form of a hologram only you can see and hear. I try to choose a balanced plate of RPGs from week to week in hopes of properly representing this gnarling hydra of a genre, but if you have a particular game you'd like to see me tackle, please let me know about it. You can do that by making a comment below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#).



After taking a fun detour into the world of social RPGs last week, this week we're tackling something a bit more traditional. Well, sort of. Regular readers of TouchArcade probably have me pegged as the RPG guy for some reason that isn't possible to discern. It's true that I love RPGs deeply, but I like playing all sorts of genres. And while I've fallen off a bit with the genre recently, that does include first-person shooters, a genre that might seem on its face to be pretty far from the RPG tree. Throw in my love of classic games, and you can probably guess the fondness I have for id Software's *Doom* series. I'll go so far as to say *Doom 2* is on a very short list of games that I consider to be near-perfect. So you can bet when I heard id had made a *Doom RPG*, I was ready and raring to play it.

One of the things I've always admired about John Carmack, one of the founders of id Software, is his eagerness to embrace new technology. That continues even to this day, as we saw when he left the company he helped build to join the Oculus Rift project full-time. Today his eyes are on VR technology and space travel, but just a decade ago, the object of his enthusiasm was mobile gaming. After receiving a cell phone from his wife, Carmack naturally tried out some of the games available for it. He came

away frustrated at the poor quality he perceived, and decided to take a swing at doing better. Keep in mind, a decade ago predates the iPhone, meaning he was working with JME and BREW devices. An unexpected turn for a guy previously known for building some of the most powerful, cutting-edge engines in the world, but it worked out pretty well.

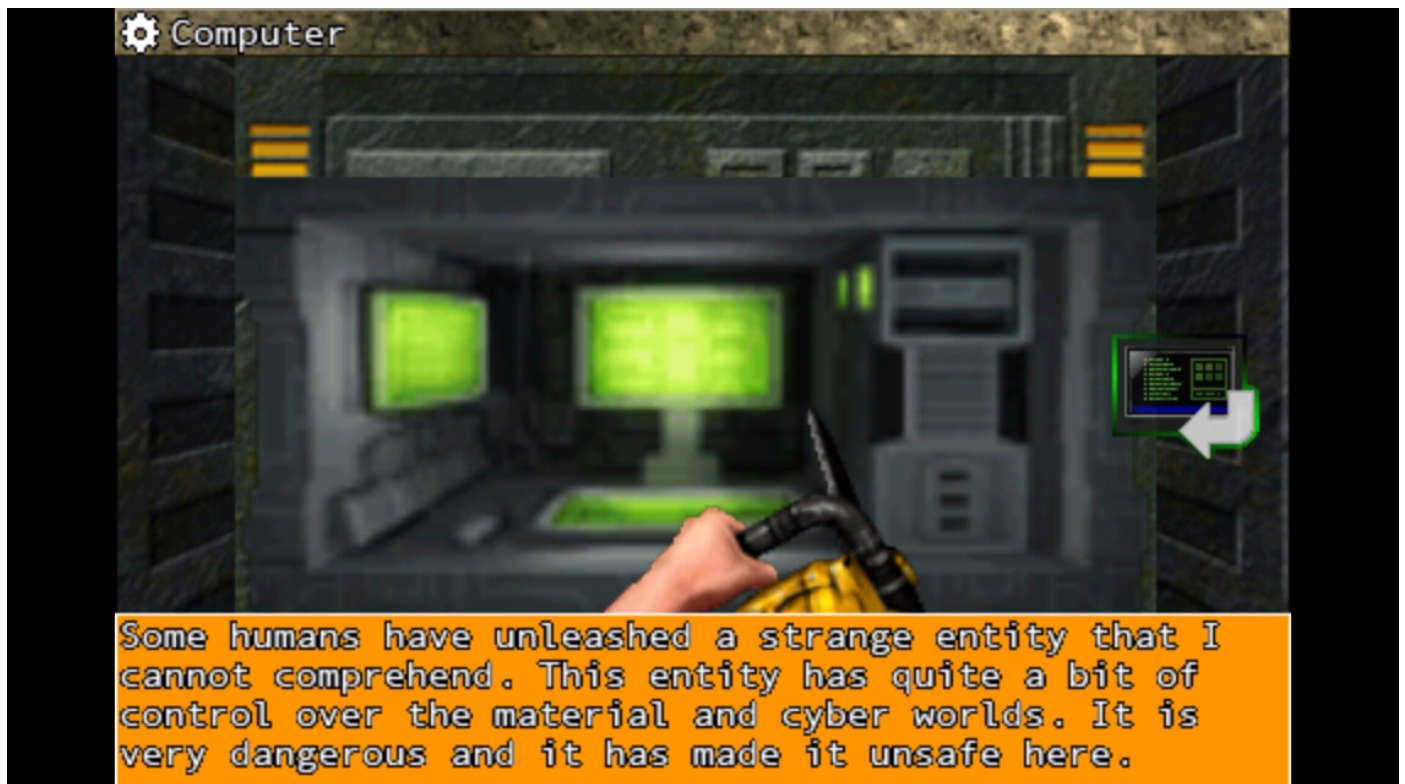


Although id Software was primarily known for action games, it was clear that the mobile devices of that time were ill-suited for such games. The minimal amount of available system resources, the poor resolutions of displays, and perhaps most importantly, the numeric keypads used for input added up to a platform unlikely to host a fast-paced first-person shooter. What a difference a few years made, right? Anyway, from there, Carmack decided a turn-based RPG might be the best way to go. With the *Doom* movie coming up later that year, there was an unusual opportunity for id Software to get a little cross-media synergy going. Carmack sorted out the main ideas and sent the project off to Fountainhead Entertainment, a studio headed by his wife, Katherine Anna Kang. The company had primarily worked in machinima up to that point, but Kang and her studio would prove not only to be up to the task, but would also be a strong booster of mobile gaming for years to come. In



early September 2005, *Doom RPG* was born. Though the concept was odd on paper, the game proved to be a big success, one that was soon followed up by other RPG projects like *Orcs & Elves* and *Wolfenstein RPG*.

By the time the second *Orcs & Elves* had hit the virtual shelves, Apple was well on its way with the iPhone. The first of the id Software RPGs to make the jump to the new platform was *Wolfenstein RPG* in early 2009. In some ways, I think that might have been their best mobile game, and would certainly have been the topic of one of these articles were it not for its untimely removal in early 2013. Instead, our focus is on the next (and last) RPG id Software released for iOS, *Doom 2 RPG* ([\\$0.99](#)). An enhanced port of the 2009 feature phone sequel to *Doom RPG*, the game continued the story of the original while adding new weapons, enemies, and environments. The iOS version was released in February of 2010, and has curiously not been updated even once. Either through good fortune or clever coding, the game has yet to break in any of the iOS version upgrades. That's fortunate for us, because I'm not sure if id Software would or could fix it at this point if it did break.



*Doom 2 RPG* sits in an interesting position. In its time, it was considered to be a sign of diminishing returns for id Software's line of RPGs. Too much of a similar thing, and in a lot of ways a step back from *Wolfenstein RPG*. In 2015, with Carmack working on VR, Fountainhead no more, id Software no longer working on mobile projects, and all other id RPGs made unavailable due to expired licenses or deprecated technology, *Doom 2 RPG* remains the sole survivor of this period in the notable developer's history. Well, that and the Nintendo DS port of *Orcs & Elves*, I suppose. That means there's very little else like it anymore, turning a seemingly unnecessary extension into a valuable relic, free to stand on its own feet.

In that context, it's an interesting game, though certainly not without its flaws. Imagine *Doom* if it were grid-based and proceeded in a turn-by-turn fashion, and you won't be far from what this game looks like. You'll have to search through nine labyrinthine stages, killing monsters, hunting down colorful keycards, and humping every wall to find secret stashes of items and equipment. There's a story that stitches it all together, though it's not a terribly interesting one. Better narrative success is found in the game's quirky sense of humor. You'll meet a lot of characters on your journey, and very few of them resist the urge to go pants-on-head goofy from time to time. Pop culture and geek culture references abound, and the yields of your looting are generally hilarious. What else would you expect to find on the body of a *Doom* imp but severed human fingers and such?



Very little of the loot you find on bodies is of any use at all, but you'll still find plenty of worthy pick-ups through exploration. Ammunition, special temporary power-up drinks, health packs, armor, cash, and new weapons can all be found strewn about each level. Typically, you won't receive a new weapon until the story decides you're getting it, and while you can level up by earning enough experience points, the number of enemies on each level is set, so your power progression is actually quite linear. On top of that, although there are plenty of secrets to find, there's really only one way to proceed through each stage. The main strategy in the game comes from resource management and choosing the right weapon to tackle each monster with.

This makes for a very methodical experience, and while that might be a turn-off for some, I personally find it satisfying in a particular sort of way. With a finite amount of everything in the world, it becomes something of a large puzzle on the whole, albeit a very lenient one. It's absolutely possible to find yourself at a boss without enough resources to survive. Since combat is little more than selecting the right weapon, buffing up with drinks, and trading blows, the more difficult battles frequently come down to having enough flak



jackets and health kits to outlast your enemy. This is the case with most of id Software's RPGs, but it's perhaps worse in the *Doom RPGs* than the others since there are overall fewer tactical options. Some people might consider the possibility of reaching a no-win situation to be terrible design in any situation. Personally, I think there's a place for it, but it's kind of crummy in a game that only allows a single save file.



While *Doom 2 RPG* isn't a long game by genre standards, most players will likely take five or six hours to get through it all. It's certainly long enough to sting if you have to restart due to an unwinnable encounter. Luckily, there's a cheat code you can use, and while I'm not generally a fan of using cheats, I think it's forgivable in this case. Just in case you're playing along at home and you need a little help, all you have to do is go to the menu screen in-game and tap on the screen in this order: top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right, bottom left, bottom right. That should open up the cheat menu for you, allowing you to do what you need to. True to id Software form, there are a lot of fun cheats in that menu that have little to do with helping you beat the game, too. Enjoy!

One of the great things about *Doom 2*, the first-person shooter, is its fine line-up of weapons. Most of them make an appearance in *Doom 2 RPG*, with the series trademark chainsaw falling into your hands almost immediately. Using the chainsaw requires you to be in melee range, but it also rewards you with a permanent strength boost every once in a while, so it pays to slice up everything in sight. Yes, even the bodies, but make sure you loot them first. Loot and chainsaws do not mix, friends. There are also a few new weapons, including the hilarious Holy Water Gun. You can fill it up from any source of water, including toilets, and most of the demons you'll fight absolutely hate it. If you spray them with it, they'll take damage and be put in a state of fear, signified by giant Rare-eseque googly-eyes that look hilarious on just about any vintage id sprite. Other new weapons include a scope for your rifle that allows you to tilt to aim for extra damage, sentry robots you can deploy to fight your battles for you, and following in fine id RPG tradition, toilets.



You'll need to get a feel for which weapons are best against which types of monsters. *Doom 2 RPG* has a much larger roster of creatures than the first game, including new demons like the Sawkubus. The classic enemies like



the Spidermind and Cacodemon are here too, looking a little sharper than they once did without treading into the full remake appearances found in *Doom 3* and beyond. Having the classic enemies and weapons in the game go a long way towards making it feel like the original *Doom* games, which is important because the level designs, likely by necessity, don't strike a similar feeling. There are fewer wide open spaces, fewer environmental traps, and an overall more corridor-focused design at play in the levels. Perhaps in deference to the wider audience, there don't seem to be nearly as many genuinely scary set pieces. Monster closets lose a bit of their punch when things are turn-based, I guess.

The engine seems pretty quaint these days, but those monster closets at least demonstrate its power in throwing a large number of objects on the screen at one time. One of the bosses is basically a living monster generator, and if it's allowed to get up to full speed, you'll be facing off against more Pinkies than you've likely seen in some time. The game plays well enough, but its roots as a numberpad-based game show. Apart from a couple of gestures for things like strafing, you'll be dealing with buttons mapped to the screen in various ways. There are a few mini-games where you can use more direct touching and swiping, but it's not hard to imagine someone playing this on a flip-phone at all.



It's probably for the best that the game wraps up a bit earlier than some of id's other RPGs. The careful drip-feed of new weapons throughout the game helps the gameplay from getting too monotonous, but between the narrow strategic options and the somewhat limited visual variety in the levels, *Doom 2 RPG* could easily have worn out its welcome had it pushed on much longer. As it stands, it's just about the right length for a replay now and then without being a burden on your schedule. It's worth it to enjoy a little hit of vintage Doom nostalgia filtered through some cheeky, self-effacing humor. You can even choose from three different characters, though their differences beyond their respective appearances disappear pretty quickly. It's not something I'd replay awfully frequently, but I do get the urge to play an id RPG every couple of years or so. There aren't a ton of options on the App Store in that regard, even if you do have *Wolfenstein RPG* in your purchase history.

As I've already mentioned, *Doom 2 RPG* hasn't seen a single update since its initial release in early 2010. That means it doesn't have support for a whole lot of things. It came out just before the iPad, so there's no native support for that device, and of course, no support for larger iPhone screens, either. No

retina display support, no iCloud support, no controller support of any kind, and even no multitasking support. It still plays fine, but it's too bad it's likely never to see any updates unless it breaks, and even then, I doubt they'd do much more than the minimum to get it back up and running. It wasn't exactly a huge hit in its iOS form, after all, and I doubt that situation has improved over time. Its future prospects seem somewhat bleak, and perhaps it will be missed by only a few when the inevitable happens. Yet, with it being the last officially available remnant of an industry legend's flirtations with handheld RPGs, I'll be pretty sad the day *Doom 2 RPG* follows in the footsteps of its predecessors, whenever that may be.



That's just my take on *Doom 2 RPG*, though. What do you all think, friends? You know what to do. Make a comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) with your thoughts. The next episode of the **RPG Reload Podcast** will be going up next week barring any horrible wheat thresher accidents, and it's quite a fun one in my opinion. If you'd like to send in a question for us to answer on the next **RPG Reload Podcast**, you can do that via [rpgreloadpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:rpgreloadpodcast@gmail.com). As for me, I'll be back next week with another great RPG. Wait, if this is number 49, and there



were two holiday specials, that means next week officially marks a full year of **RPG Reload**! Wow! Thanks to everyone for your support over this last year. We'll have to play something special for **File 050**, won't we? Thanks for reading!

**Next Week's Reload:** *The World Ends With You* [\(\\$17.99\)](#).